

Telegram from Gertrude McCurdy Hubbard to Alexander Graham Bell, March 22, 1903

1331 CONNECTICUT AVENUE. WASHINGTON, D. C. March 21st, 1903. My Dear Sir:

I have discovered, among the papers left by the late Honorable Gardiner Greene Hubbard, a rough draft of certain recommendations to the Board of Regents, prepared by him shortly before his death in 1897.

On the first of February 1897, Mr. Hubbard offered the following resolution which was adopted by the Board:

“RESOLVED: That a committee of five be appointed by the Chancellor, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution being ex-officio a member, upon the National Museum, the Bureau of American Ethnology, and the National Zoological Park, with especial reference to the ascertainment of what can be done to promote their usefulness and value, and to report to the Board of Regents at its next meeting”.

Mr. Hubbard, who was Chairman of the Committee appointed, died December 11th, 1897; and his recommendations do not seem to have been brought to the attention of his Committee, or the Board of Regents.

In view of the fact that the Board has now under consideration the very subject that occupied the attention of Mr. Hubbard, during the last days of his life, I take pleasure in enclosing for your information, a copy of the recommendations left by him.

Yours sincerely, (Signed) Alexander Graham Bell Dear Mrs. Hubbard A copy of the above letter, together with the recommendations referred to was sent to each member of the Board of Regents, and to Secretary Langley. Your loving son Alexander Graham Bell

RECOMMENDATIONS of the late Honorable Gardiner Greene Hubbard.

The Regents meet but once a year, — for one or two hours — and are largely occupied by the report of the Secretary. They acquire little more information in regard to the work of the Smithsonian, than any one who reads the report; and therefore they cannot be expected to take much interest in it.

There should be a closer union between the Secretary and Executive Committee and the Board of Regents than has existed in recent times. This can be accomplished:

A. By committees of the Regents for each of the four Departments who should, with the Secretary, once each quarter, visit the Department, to which they have been assigned, and confer with the Secretary in regard to the working.

B. By regular monthly meetings of the Executive Committee — save during the summer months.

C. As there will be an increase in the income from the interest on the recent gifts to the Smithsonian, it will be easy to increase the appropriation for Exploring Expeditions, and these might be regularly sent out to such countries as might be from time to time designated. Possibly explorations in Central and South Africa, and thereby add collections of great value to our Museum, beside contributing to the extension of our knowledge of the early history of countries little known, or physical laboratory for investigation of air, gasses, etc.

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D. We have in connection with the different departments of Government, many scientific Bureaus and Departments — all established since the Smithsonian — except the Coast and Geodetic Survey and the more important directly under the administration of Prof. Henry — our first Secretary.

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Let the Secretary each year select from the Universities of America or Europe, gentlemen conversant with the different Departments of science, and invite them to spend from six to ten weeks in Washington, to lecture upon subjects with which they are particularly acquainted; confer with the heads of these Bureaus and Departments, learn their ways of work and what they are doing.

E. The Directors of the Bureaus of Ethnology, of the Museum, of the Zoological Park, and the Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian, should prepare annually, a statement, giving in considerable detail the work proposed for the ensuing year, the amount of appropriation required and the names of the principal assistant and employees. The plan should then be approved by the Secretary and Executive Committee.

F. In order to give the Secretary more time for research, and at the same time to give greater efficiency to the service, each chief should be held responsible for the proper and economical performance of the work of his Department, and for this purpose should have control over the employment and discharge of his employees — on the approval of the Secretary — and the expenditure of monies appropriated to his Department, and be held responsible for results, acting at all times under the general supervision of the Secretary.

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G. Quarterly reports should be prepared by the three directors and the Assistant Secretary, of the work of the past months, of the amount expended, and after its approval by the Secretary, copies should be forwarded to each member of the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee now audit all the accounts of the several departments connected with the Smithsonian. This takes much time and the duty could be better performed by a regular accountant. The accounts seem all regular, but no person unacquainted with accounts, can be sure that he has properly performed his work.

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Museum.

My inquiries have convinced me that Mr. Brown-Goode had no superior in the world as a museum administrator, and that no one was better acquainted with what a museum ought to be and should be, than my friend; that no one could have been more devoted to his work.

If defects exist in the Museum, they must arise from some other causes, and on inquiry I have become convinced that the great difficulty is want of room for the collection and working laboratories. That as much more additional space as we now have is required for the proper exhibition of the material now in our possession; that with such room for the exhibition of our collection, our museum would show its great and practical value.

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I am well aware of the great interest that Senator Morrill — the senior member of our Board, has always taken in our work, but I know that some of the Regents realize their want of knowledge and therefore take little interest in the work.

If the Regents had understood the necessities of the case, and plans for a suitable building had been presented to Congress and Congress urged to make the necessary appropriation, a new building could be obtained.

I would advise that the architect of the Library, Mr. Bernard Greene, be requested to prepare outline plans for a museum building, to be presented to Congress at the next session.

That a committee of the Regents be appointed to draft and present a memorial to Congress setting forth the necessity for a new building and for a larger appropriation; showing the great work our museum has done and its great benefit to the country.

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I can not doubt that such a memorial would receive the attention it deserved.